LOOK BACK IN ANGER

JOHN OSBORNE

Themes John Osborne

- New Feelings
- We need new feelings as much as we need new language
- Passive generation (nobody cares)
- No one feels the size of degradation
- Decay of the English society
- Decay of traditions
- Decay of self image

Themes John Osborne

- Decay of classes and social system
- Decay of the English establishment
- Isolation and Frustration
- Caused by the bourgeois values
- A new generation that is useless and jobless
- Conceptual poverty
- People don’t read
- Lack of knowledge and culture
- Shallow interests

Summary Act I

- **The play opens with Alison at the ironing board and Jimmy and Cliff in easy chairs reading the Sunday papers. Jimmy complains that half the book review he is reading in his "posh" paper is in French.**
- **He asks Alison if that makes her feel ignorant and she replies that she wasn't listening to the question.**
- **Jimmy's complains about the inertia of Alison and the inertia of the whole middle-class of England.**
- **Jimmy teases Cliff about being uneducated and ignorant and Cliff agrees with him.**
- **Jimmy says that Alison hasn't had a thought for years and she agrees.**
- **Jimmy is depressed by their Sunday routine and says their youth is slipping away.**
- **He says, "Let's pretend that we're human beings**

- **He then rails about the fact that "Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasms."**
- **He says that England has lost her soul, that it is dreary living in "the American Age."**
- **He then turns on Alison, calling her "the Lady Pusillanimous."**
- **He then attacks women in general, Alison, and even Mrs. Drury, their landlady.**
- **Cliff and Jimmy then playfully wrestle and accidentally push over Alison and the ironing board.**
- **Alison has burnt her arm and finally tells Jimmy to get out.**
- **She tells Cliff that she is pregnant. She is afraid to tell Jimmy lest he think she planned it.**
- **Jimmy reestablishes himself Cliff goes out for cigarettes.**

- **Jimmy tells Alison that he wants her; they play their private game of "squirrels and bears"**
- **Alison is about to tell him of her pregnancy when Cliff returns to say Helena Charles, friend of Alison whom Jimmy hates, is on the phone downstairs.**
- **When Alison returns she says she has invited Helena to stay with them during her engagement at the local theatre.**
- **Jimmy launches his most shocking attack.**
- **He tells Alison that if she were to have a child and if that child would die, then she might suffer enough to become a human being.**

Act II

- scene 1
- **It is evening two weeks later. Helena and Alison are getting ready to go to church.**
- **Jimmy is in Cliff's room practicing jazz on his trumpet.**
- **Jimmy's friend Hugh and Hugh's working-class mother, who provided the money needed to start the candy business, are discussed.**
- **Alison talks of being cut off from the kind of people she had always known. She still hasn't told Jimmy she is pregnant.**
- **After Cliff and Jimmy enter, Jimmy launches into another attack on the Establishment in general and Alison's mother in particular.**
- **He then tells of keeping his father company as he lay dying for months and says he "learnt at an early age what it was to be angry—angry and helpless."**
- **Jimmy is called to the phone. Helena tells Alison that she has telegraphed Alison's father to come and take her home.**
- **Jimmy returns and says Hugh's mother has had a stroke and he will go to London to be with her. He tells Alison he needs her to go with him.**
- **She leaves with Helena.**

- **scene 2**
- **It is the following evening and Colonel Redfern, Alison's father, is visiting.**
- **He sees some right on Jimmy's side and was horrified by his wife's brutal attempts to prevent Alison from marrying Jimmy.**
- **He says he and Alison are much alike in that they both "like to sit on a fence. It is rather comfortable."**
- **Alison tries to explain why she married Jimmy**
- **Helena comes in followed shortly by Cliff. Helena will stay one more night so she can attend an audition nearby.**
- **Alison asks Cliff to give a letter to Jimmy and he refuses.**
- **Jimmy comes back and reads Alison's letter.**
- **Helena tells him Alison is pregnant and Jimmy says he doesn't care.**
- **He has watched Hugh's mother die and has no pity for Alison. He turns on Helena calling her an "evil-minded"**
- **She slaps his face; then, he cries in despair.**

ACT III

- **scene 1**
- **It is early Sunday evening several months later.**
- **Jimmy and Cliff in their armchairs reading the Sunday newspapers and Helena is at the ironing board.**
- **All seems very relaxed They talk about a newspaper article and Jimmy starts in on religion and politics.**
- **Jimmy and Cliff do a song and dance and end with playful wrestling.**
- **Cliff's shirt gets dirty and Helena leaves to wash it.**
- **Cliff says he is going to move out and give up the candy stall.**
- **The door opens and Alison enters, looking ill and obviously thin. Jimmy exits and leaves the two women looking at each other.**

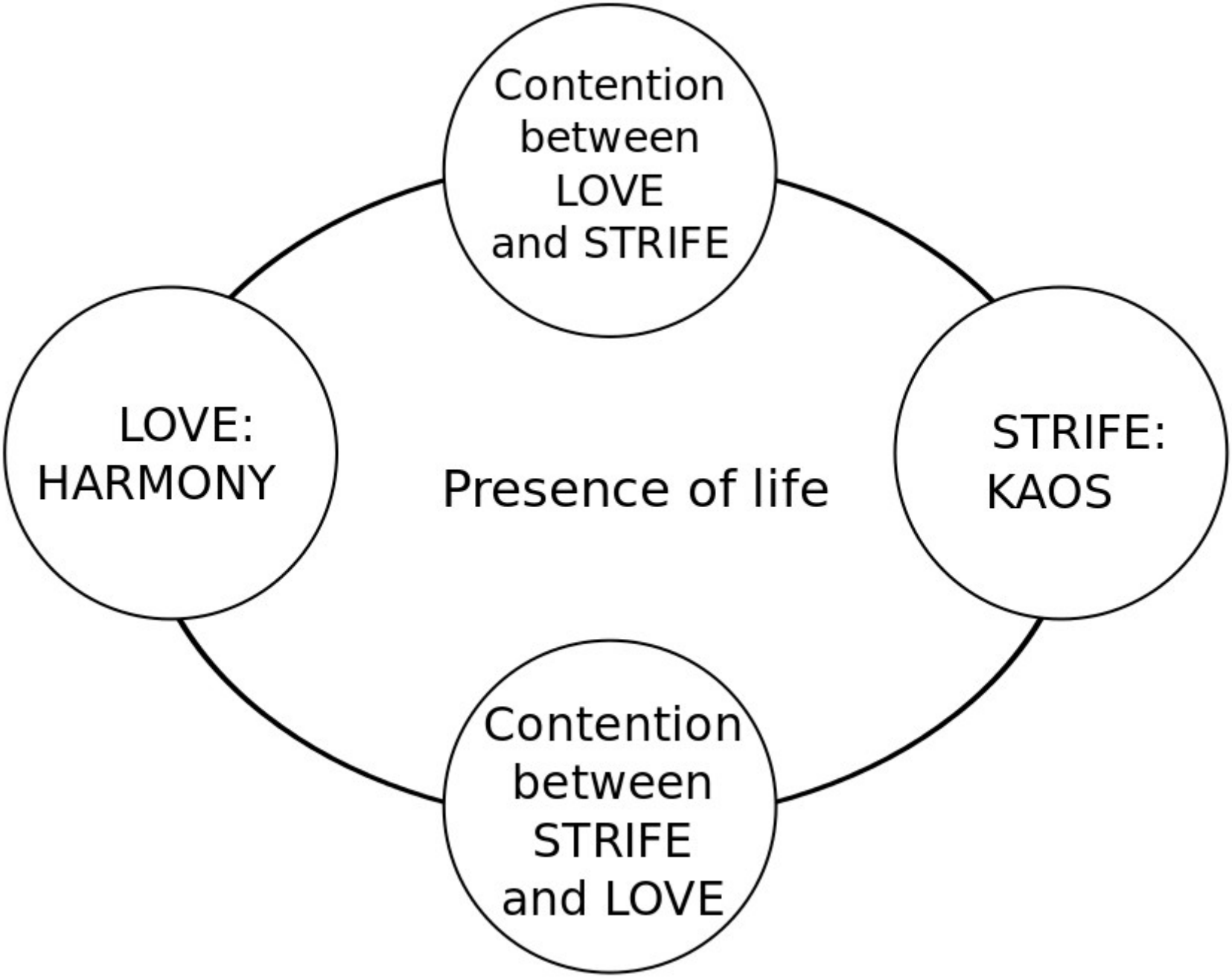
- **scene 2**
- **It is moments later. There is the sound of Jimmy's trumpet from across the hall.**
- **Alison has suffered a miscarriage.**
- **She says she doesn't know why she came.**
- **Helena says that it is all over between her and Jimmy, that she realizes that what she has been doing is wrong, and she can't live with that. Then she leaves**
- **Alison says she will go. He softens and talks of the old bear going through the forest of life alone.**
- **He remembers their first meeting and says, "I may be a lost cause, but I thought if you loved me, it needn't matter.“**
- **Alison cries and says she is in pain.**
- **Jimmy gently comforts her.**
- **They enter into their game of bear and squirrel in what is apparently a reconciliation.**

Structure of the Dramatic Action

- **A realistic play, reflects chapters of the life of two different spouses**
- **The plot is a plot of co-existence between a bear and a squirrel.**
- **This game is based on difference not sameness**
- **Tired souls from the pain of being alive, so they preferred to be animals. (p 47) (p93)**

Empedocles

- Life consists of four elements: water, fire, earth and air
- There are forces which would mix and separate the elements, respectively.
- There forces are: Love and Strife , attraction and repulsion, harmony and variance


Contention between LOVE and STRIFE
LOVE: HARMONY
Presence of life
STRIFE: KAOS
Contention between STRIFE and LOVE

- **Life is painful and full of traps. (p 94)**
- **Escaping from the life of pain by two strategies 1. Neutral 2. Angry**
- **They focused on difference at the beginning of the dramatic action.**
- **When they realize that traps don’t differentiate between bears and squirrels, they reach harmony. (p 96)**

- **The dramatic action is based on the coexistence between the passive female squirrel and the angry furious male bear.**
- **Life has to go on not on sameness but on the harmony of difference.**
- **Therefore, the shape of the dramatic action is:**

YING

ALISON

NEUTRAL
FEMALE
NIGHT
PASSIVE
MOON
INTUITIVE
COLD
SOFT

YANG

JIMMY

ANGERY
MALE
DAY
ACTIVE
SUN
LOGICAL
HOT
HARD

- It is the coexistence between Yin and Yang.
- That is not based on sameness but on the harmony of difference

Jimmy Porter

- Animalistic imagery
- Bear, furious, angry, lonely ,barbarian
- Time
- Close Past of pain (personal p 57, 58)
- Present of frustration and pain(collective p 84)
- Unchanging future this is what makes him (angry)(p68)
- Vertical time of helplessness

- He holds the values of the far past which are not suitable for the present. 67
- Modern Don Quixote born too late (p 45 ,86, 90)
- Aristotelian
- He is a modern Hamlet
- A modern tragic Hero whose catastrophe is “frustration, helplessness, anger, thinking a lot but unable to make decisions, and giving up.”

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,
Grew lean while he assailed the seasons; He wept that he was ever born,
And he had reasons.
Miniver loved the days of old
When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;
The vision of a warrior bold
Would set him dancing.
Miniver sighed for what was not,
And dreamed, and rested from his labors;
He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,
And Priam's neighbors.
Miniver mourned the ripe renown
That made so many a name so fragrant;

Miniver loved the Medici,
Albeit he had never seen one;
He would have sinned incessantly Could he have been one.
Miniver cursed the commonplace
And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;
He missed the medieval grace
Of iron clothing.
Miniver scorned the gold he sought But sore annoyed was he without it; Miniver thought, and thought, and thought, And thought about it.
Miniver Cheevy, born too late,
Scratched his head and kept on thinking; Miniver coughed, and

- Psychoanalysis
- He is a masochistic character (p 54)
- He hates his mother and doesn’t want Alison to be the same (a wrong ally). (p 57)
- He wanted Alison to be a mother and an ally (p 91)

Other characters

- Alison
- 10, 19, 34, 36, 42, 66, 95
- Cliff
- 11, 30, 48, 60,
- Helena
- Helena of Troy- dragged by desire (personal destructive hubris)
- 35, 55, 90